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ABSTRACT

A study examined the physical ability requirements for entry-level probation officers in the California. The study, which was undertaken at the request of the California Board of Corrections, had the following objectives: statewide job analysis of the requirements of three entry-level positions in county agencies--corrections officer, probation officer, and juvenile counselor; development of selection standards and validation of entry-level selection procedures for these positions, and development of training standards and curricula for these positions. On-site observations and interviews were conducted with 74 incumbents and 20 supervisors at probation departments in eight agencies representative of the state with respect to geographic location. It was determined that only three tasks performed by probation officers statewide are considered physically demanding. These are arresting probationers who violate the law or conditions of probation, physically restraining individuals, and transporting individuals. Moreover, these tasks were found to represent less than 1 percent of the core tasks of the job of probation officer as a whole. In view of these findings, it was not recommended that the Board of Corrections develop any statewide probation officer selection standards related to physical abilities. (MN)

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STANDARDS AND TRAINING
FOR CORRECTIONS PROGRAM

STC

BOARD OF CORRECTIONS

PHYSICAL ABILITIES REPORT

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PROBATION OFFICER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....i

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....ii

LIST OF TABLES.....ii

I. INTRODUCTION.....1

II. JOB ANALYSIS FINDINGS REGARDING PO PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS.....2
Method.....2
Results.....2

III. SUMMARY.....4

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Statewide Frequency and Importance Ratings for Physically Demanding PO Core Tasks.....5

Table 2 Statewide Usefulness Ratings for PO Physical Abilities and Skills with a Physically Demanding Component.....6

Table 3 Overall Usefulness of Physical Abilities Relative to Other Broad Types of PO Worker Characteristics.....7

CALIFORNIA BOARD OF CORRECTIONS
Standards and Training for Corrections Program

PHYSICAL ABILITY REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROBATION OFFICER (PO) POSITION: SUMMARY OF JOB ANALYSIS FINDINGS

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the period 1982-1985, Personnel Decisions, Inc. conducted a major research program for the California Board of Corrections, Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) Program. The research program had three primary objectives:

1. Statewide job analysis of the requirements of three entry-level positions in county agencies: Corrections Officer, Probation Officer, and Juvenile Counselor positions.

2. Development of selection standards and validation of entry-level selection procedures for these positions.

3. Development of training standards and curricula for these positions.

As one part of the overall research program, evidence was collected concerning the physical demands of the positions and recommendations were to be provided regarding implementation of entry-level physical abilities standards. The present report deals with that part of the overall research program, as it applies to the Probation Officer position.

For the Probation Officer (PO) position, we have not recommended the establishment of any statewide physical ability or medical fitness standards for use in either selection or training. This is because the statewide job analysis results indicate that the typical physical demands of the Probation Officer position are not sufficient to warrant the establishment of such standards by the Board of Corrections.

This report summarizes the statewide job analysis findings regarding the physical requirements of the Probation Officer position. As such, it documents why no physical ability or medical fitness standards have been recommended.

We have aimed to write this report in a nontechnical manner, to make it interpretable and useful to all interested parties. If any technical questions should arise which are not fully addressed by this report, we will be pleased to address them. They should be directed to:

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Questions concerning the project as a whole should be directed to the California Board of Corrections, Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) Program.

II. JOB ANALYSIS FINDINGS REGARDING PO PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

Method

At the heart of the statewide job analysis was a comprehensive job analysis questionnaire. That questionnaire was developed based on:

- o Position descriptions, training and orientation manuals, performance evaluation forms, policy and procedure manuals, and existing job analysis reports from many different agencies;

- o Relevant findings reported in the corrections, criminal justice, psychology, and sociology literature; and,

- o On-site observations and interviews with 74 incumbents and 20 supervisors at Probation Departments in eight agencies representative of the state with respect to geographic location and size.

The job analysis questionnaires were completed by 635 Probation Officer incumbents and 274 Probation Officer supervisors from departments in 26 different agencies. The agencies were representative of the state as a whole in terms of size and geographic location, and respondents from those agencies were chosen by a random sampling procedure with stratification to assure representation of females and minorities. All of the respondents had at least 6 months of experience on the job, with the average experience being 11 years for incumbents, and 20 years for supervisors (11 years at the supervisor level, preceded by 9 years at the Probation Officer level).

The questionnaire responses of these 909 incumbents and supervisors were used to obtain a thorough overall perspective on the statewide requirements of the Probation Officer position, and to define the "core job" as it exists statewide. The core job consists of the job elements which are common to Probation Officer jobs across agencies and departments. It identifies the common denominators on which statewide standards can appropriately be based.

Results

The questionnaire yielded:

- . incumbent and supervisor ratings of the frequency and importance of the full range of Probation Officer tasks,

- . incumbent and supervisor ratings of the usefulness of relevant knowledges, skills, abilities, and other characteristics, and

- . supervisor judgments as to when those characteristics should be developed (before hire versus after hire).

These results, obtained statewide, provided a solid basis for evaluating both the absolute importance of the physical requirements of the position, and their importance relative to other requirements. As it turned out, the statewide results indicated that the Probation Officer position tends not to be a physically demanding one -- that physical requirements are low in both absolute and relative importance.

Tables 1-3 summarize the relevant results.* For more details, see the complete job analysis technical report (Grabow, Houston, & Sevy, 1983).

As can be seen from Table 1, the core tasks performed by Probation Officers statewide include only three which are considered physically demanding, and none of those three tasks have even medium frequency or importance. Moreover, they represent less than 1% of the core tasks in the Probation Officer job as a whole (a total of approximately 130 core tasks were identified for the statewide Probation Officer job, and the vast majority of those have substantially higher frequency and/or importance than do these three physically demanding tasks; see Grabow, et al, 1983 for the full listing of Probation Officer core tasks.) It also is worth noting that the Probation Officer job analysis questionnaire did have incumbents and supervisors rate a number of other physically demanding tasks (e.g., items 97-99: search residences, automobiles, people; item 239: pursue and subdue fleeing individuals; item 241: evacuate individuals from an area or facility). These other physically demanding tasks did not prove, however, to be core tasks. That is, they proved to be performed by less than 50% of the incumbents, and to receive less than medium importance ratings from supervisors.

Table 2 shows the statewide mean usefulness ratings which incumbents and supervisors provided for individual physical skills and abilities addressed through the job analysis questionnaire. As can be seen, with the exception of skill in driving a car, none of the physically demanding skills exceed a moderate level of importance, and the basic physical abilities are consistently rated to be only slightly useful.

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* These tables are laid out to correspond directly to Tables 1-3 in our Development and Validation Reports for the recommended physical abilities standards for Corrections Officers and Juvenile Counselors.

Table 3 shows how the physical abilities as a whole compare to other broad groupings of Probation Officer worker characteristics in terms of their rated overall usefulness by supervisors. The characteristics are grouped according to whether they were judged by supervisors as needing to be developed before hire versus after hire; 18 are classified as "before hire", 8 others are classified as "after hire". As can be seen:

- Physical abilities are shown to have lower relative usefulness than almost all the other characteristics (ranking 17th of 18 in the set of "before hire" characteristics, and 25th of 26 overall).

- With the exception of skill in driving, skills with a physically demanding component (safety and first aid; searching; self-defense and physical restraint of others) also prove to be low in relative usefulness (ranked as the lowest three in the set of eight "after hire" characteristics, and approximately 15th to 18th in the total set of 24.

III. SUMMARY

Given the scarcity of physically demanding core tasks in the Probation Officer job, and the low relative usefulness which incumbents and supervisors alike assign to all physical skills and abilities except skill in driving, it is clear that the statewide Probation Officer position tends not to be a physically demanding one. As such, we do not recommend that the Board of Corrections move to establish any statewide standards specifically designed to set minimum physical ability requirements for Probation Officer selection or training.

A selection standard requiring "possession of (or ability to acquire) a valid driving license" could be supported by these data if the Board of Corrections wished to implement such a standard on a statewide basis. It is, however, the only statewide selection standard related to physical abilities which these data will support.

Finally, with respect to training, we should note that these data are consistent with providing Probation Officers with basic training on the topics of safety and first aid, searching, and self-defense and physical restraint of others. These are all topics which Probation Officer incumbents and supervisors statewide judge to have moderate usefulness in the job. The usefulness is not high enough (or sufficiently supported by task requirements) to warrant statewide minimum standards in these areas, but it is high enough to warrant some coverage of them during basic training.

TABLE 1

Statewide Frequency and Importance Ratings For
Physically Demanding PO Core Tasks

Frequency rated by incumbents on a a 0 - 8 scale, where:

0 = Never, not part of my job
1 = Once or twice a year or less
2 = More often than twice a year, but less than once a month
3 = About once a month
4 = Two or three times a month
5 = About once a week
6 = Several times a week
7 = About once a day
8 = More than once a day

Importance rated by supervisors on 0 - 5 scale, where:

0 = Not part of the ob
1 = Low
2 = Moderately low
3 = Medium
4 = Moderately high
5 = High

Relevant Core Tasks*	Mean Frequency	Mean Importance
112. Arrest probationers who violate the law or conditions of probation.....	1.4	2.5
140. Physically restrain physically acting-out probationer or other individual.....	0.6	2.7
224. Transport individuals (for example, from detention site to court, hospitals, airports, referral programs).....	1.6	2.1

*Identified through supervisor ratings of the importance of physical abilities to the performance of sets of tasks. Tasks listed are ones from sets for which physical abilities received mean ratings of medium or higher importance (i.e. mean ratings above 2.5).

TABLE 2

Statewide Usefulness Ratings for PO Physical Abilities and Skills with a Physically Demanding Component

Usefulness rated on a scale of 0 - 4, where:
0 = Not useful
1 = Slightly useful
2 = Moderately useful
3 = Very useful
4 = Extremely useful

		Mean Usefulness	
	Skills	Incumbents	Supervisors
39.	Using self-defense	2.1	2.2
40.	Using physical restraint techniques	1.9	2.1
41.	Using restraining gear (for example, handcuffs leg irons)	2.0	2.2
48.	Searching persons for contraband or weapons	2.2	2.1
49.	Searching vehicles for contraband or weapons	1.8	1.5
50.	Searching residences or institutional facilities for contraband	1.8	1.6
51.	Administering first aid	2.3	2.3
52.	Administering CPR	2.3	2.3
53.	Driving a car	3.4	3.5
	Abilities		
65.	Upper body strength	1.1	1.2
66.	Leg strength	1.1	1.1
67.	Whole body coordination	1.1	1.1
68.	Manual dexterity	1.5	1.5
69.	Eye-hand coordination	1.3	1.2
70.	Physical agility or flexibility	1.1	1.0

TABLE 3
Overall Usefulness of Physical Abilities Relative To Other Broad Types of Probation Officer Worker Characteristics

"Before-Hire" Characteristics	Supervisor Mean Usefulness Rating
1. Written Communication	3.67
2. Oral Communication	3.66
3. Motivation	3.65
4. Personal Organization	3.64
5. Reading	3.61
6. Intelligence and Judgment	3.57
7. Dominance/Self-Esteem	3.53
8. Social Skills	3.46
9. Stress Tolerance	3.45
10. Driving	3.45
11. Flexibility	3.43
12. Skill in Observing Behavior	3.24
13. Knowledge of Psychology	3.05
14. Tolerance of Negative Aspects	2.58
15. Quantitative Skill	2.45
16. Facility with Another Language	1.62
17. Physical Abilities	1.18
18. Visual Acuity	1.04
"After-Hire" Characteristics	
1. Department-Specific Knowledge	3.47
2. Knowledge of the Legal System & Terminology	3.16
3. Interviewing and Counseling Skill	2.96
4. Knowledge of Chemical Use and Abuse	2.91
5. Knowledge of Specific Laws	2.72
6. Safety and First Aid	2.58
7. Self-Defense and Physical Restraint of Others	2.08
8. Searching	1.77